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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN CEDING POWERS

¶1. Summary: All Taiwan dailies June 2 front-paged President Chen Shui-bian's approval of the resignation of two close aides Thursday, following Chen's relinquishing some of his responsibilities. News coverage also focused on Premier Su Tseng-chang's becoming the virtual chief of the administration; the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps' reactions to this development; alleged involvement by Chen's son-in-law in the insider trading scandal; and other corruption scandals. The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" ran a banner headline on page four that read "Premier Su Obtains Substantive Powers, Good News for Cross-Strait [Relations]." The pro-status quo "China Times," in the meantime, carried the results of its latest survey, which showed that 43 percent of respondents said they believe Chen should resign, a rise of 9 percent when compared with the newspaper's last poll on May 27.

¶2. Most papers editorialized on Chen's political predicament and Taiwan's controversial constitutional systems, namely, whether it is a presidential system or a cabinet system. An editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, said the top priority for Taiwan's democracy to endure and prosper is for the island to write a new constitution. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said Chen's decision poses dangers for Su as the move is unlikely to defuse any of the scandals plaguing the administration. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," however, said Chen's move will give the DPP room for revival and effectively force the DPP to take responsibility for solving its own problems. A "China Times" opinion piece said even though Chen's move can stabilize the political situation for the time being, it will just be balancing on a needle's tip. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said Chen's delegation of powers will not help him ride out the crisis. End summary.

A) "To Thoroughly Review Constitutional System and Role of Media to Lead Democracy Back onto Normal Track"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (6/2):

"... In a nutshell, even though the insider-trading scandal has triggered a series of upheavals, which seem to have created the biggest crisis ever for Taiwan's democracy, this crisis is in reality related to the ruler's governance of the country, which has nothing to do with Taiwan's democracy. But this event has taught us that to ensure that Taiwan's democracy will endure and prosper, the top priority is to write a new constitution. The new constitution, the ultimate code that will ensure Taiwan's lengthy peaceful reign, must clearly stipulate the operational style of [Taiwan's] governing system and distinguish all power relationships. Also, the media

must adhere to their professional ethics, make a clear distinction between right and wrong, abandon their biased partisan stands, and play an objective role to supervise [the government]. Only by doing so can Taiwan ride out the scandal storms and face its bright future."

B) "The Grunt Versus the Spider"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (6/2):

"So President Chen Shui-bian has bowed to snowballing scandals and declared himself a lame duck. There are those within the pan-green camp who might be happy at the prospect of Premier Su Tseng-chang being able to distance himself from the Chen administration, which has wandered from disaster to disaster during the president's second term. Many are already counting on Su to bear their standard in the 2008 presidential election, viewing his charisma and plain-talking pragmatism as their only hope against the golden boy from Hong Kong, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou. But the president's decision poses dangers for Su. After all, it is unlikely the move will defuse any of the scandals plaguing the administration. ...

"The basic problem is that, regardless of what happens to Chen, Su is going to be left with the unenviable task of cleaning up the mess. It is Su that must deal with the aftermath of the various scandals that have erupted. It is Su who will have to take the flak for the landslides, floods, typhoons, crop damage, financial problems and myriad other issues that a premier has to deal with each year. ... Of course, what is best for Ma is not necessarily best for the country. The people should ask themselves why it is that Su is where he is now. They should ask themselves if they would prefer a leader who is unafraid of risk his political capital simply to get things done, as is Su, or one who calculates from the shadows and takes advantage of others' mistakes, as does Ma. If Taiwan chooses the spider, it shouldn't cry when it gets bitten."

C) "Chen Gives DPP Room for Revival"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (6/2):

"... Chen's move will effectively force the DPP and its senior leadership to take responsibility for solving their own problems. In our view, such a move was long overdue, especially since Chen will not be able to be a candidate for president in March 2008, having already been elected to two four-year terms. Whomever the DPP's presidential standard-bearer will be, he will she will have to reinvent a new DPP image distinct from the once fresh but now time-worn 'Chen Shui-bian phenomenon.'

"It should be noted that the president is not devolving all of his power. After all, the narrowly defined constitutional powers enjoyed by the president still include policy making responsibility for national security and defense and foreign affairs (including cross-strait relations with the People's Republic of China), emergency powers in the case of national crisis or disasters, personnel appointments for the Control, Judicial and Examination Yuan and other fields. Nevertheless, the president's declaration that he will no longer directly get involved in domestic affairs serves as a belated signal to potential influence peddlers that waving the presidential signboard will be of no help in getting benefits from the DPP government. ..."

D) "A-Bian Ceding Powers, Stability on a Needle's Tip"

Professor Emile Sheng at Soochow University's Department of Political Science opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (6/2):

"... When it comes to political impact, President Chen's announcement Wednesday was akin to using his relinquishing powers in exchange for Premier Su and the New Tide Faction's agreement not to jump on the bandwagon to oppose him, so that he could finish his remaining term with stability. The success of Chen's plan will depend on how strong Vice President Annette Lu and former Premier Frank Hsieh's counterattacks will be, and whether follow-up investigations prove Chen and his wife were also involved in the

corruption scandals. In addition, whether Su's future administrative direction will conflict with Chen is another point worthy of observation. In other words, even though Chen's move to cede some powers can stabilize the political upheaval for the time being, it will just be balancing on a needle's tip. It does not indicate that the fuse leading to Chen's crisis of an early step-down is already removed. ..."

E) "Delegating Power Won't Help Chen Ride out Crisis"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] commented in an editorial (6/2):

"When President Chen Shui-bian announced his decision on Wednesday to allow Premier Su Tseng-chang to exercise more government powers, instated of continuing to concentrate them in his own hands, as has been the case in the last six years of his administration, he apparently hoped to use a change of his past authoritarian leadership style to help him weather the political crisis he is facing. But it is highly doubtful that this strategy will work. ... The problem now plaguing President Chen is not just a scandals-triggered political crisis. He is also confronting a crisis of confidence. It's no news that more than 70 percent of the people now don't have confidence in him, as shown in the latest opinion polls by major newspapers and TV networks. What is surprising is that dozens of young DPP cadres and other ruling party members came out on Wednesday to openly vent their anger over Chen, saying that they have lost faith in him and don't believe that he can continue to perform his role as the leader of the country. ..."

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